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Message Text

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44
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
---------- 022014
P R 221350Z JUL 75
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4047
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2785

EXDIS

DEPT PASS DIA AND CINCEUR

S/S-O PLEASE ALERT NEA, NEA/ARN, PM/MC

BEIRUT AND PARIS FOR RCAAS, USDAOS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ESTC, BEXP, BTIO, SY
SUBJ: SYRIAN DESIRE TO BUY 15 BOEING CHINOOK HELICOPTERS

REF: DAMASCUS 2577 (IR 6 891 0092 75) (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. BOEING REP REPORTS SYRIAN AIR FORCE ANXIOUS TO BUY 15 CHINOOK HELICOPTERS, $70 MILLION PACKAGE, DELIVERY BEGINNING AROUND SEPT 1977 TO MID 1978. AMBASSADOR URGED BOEING TO REQUEST ADVISORY OPINION FROM DEPT/MC ASAP BEFORE SYRIAN EXPECTATIONS RAISED EVEN FURTHER, THUS CREATING POTENTIAL NEGATIVE FACTOR IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. BOEING TO APPROACH DEPT/MC NEXT WEEK. WE BELIEVE RAPID RESPONSE ON ADIVSORY OPINION WOULD MINIMIZE POTENTIAL EMBARRASSMENT IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AT THIS DELICATE STAGE IN MIDDLE EAST. END SUMMARY.

2. JAMES A. FELITON, INTERNATIONAL DIRECTOR, HELICOPTERS, BOEING INTERNATIONAL (ROME), BRIEFED AMBASSADOR, DAO AND ECONOFF JULY 21 ON STATUS OF HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH SYRIAN AIR
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FORCE (SAF) OFFICERS RE SYRIAN DESIRE TO PURCHASE 15 BOEING

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CHINOOK CH 47 HELICOPTERS, TOTAL VALUE OF SALE/SPARES/
TRAINING, ETC., PUT AT $70 MILLION BY FELITON.

3. SINCE FELITON'S MORE PESSIMISTIC REPORT TO EMBASSY JUNE
30, BASED ON HIS THREE PREVIOUS TRIPS TO SYRIA (REFTEL) AND
HIS MEETINGS WITH SAF OFFICERS AT PARIS AIR SHOW, FELITON SAID
HE WAS STRUCK DURING HIS CURRENT DISCUSSIONS WITH EAGERNESS
EXHIBITED BY SAF TO PURCHASE CHINOOKS. HE SAID MONEY IS
ALREADY ON HAND FROM SAUDI ARABIA AND SARG'S NEW MILITARY
BUDGET. ONLY REMAINING STEP IN THAT DIRECTION IS TO OBTAIN
FINAL SAUDI CLEARANCE RE ACTUAL PURCHASE. SUCH CLEARANCE,
FELITON IS TOLD, WILL BE OBTAINED IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS.

4. FELITON SAID CHINOOK'S RUGGED PERFORMANCE CHARACTERISTICS
PUT IT WELL AHEAD OF SOVIET MI-8, OF WHICH HE BELIEVED SAF HAD
35 TO 40 IN INVENTORY. CHINOOK COULD DO MUCH MORE WORK,
PARTICULARLY UNDER SYRIAN CONDITIONS OF HIGH TEMPERATURES AND
ALTITUDE, AND WITH LESS MAN-POWER. WITH FINANCING AVAILABLE,
SAF COMMANDERS WANTED TO MOVE QUICKLY TO CONTRACT SIGNATURE.
DELIVERIES WOULD BEGIN ONE EACH DURING LAST FOUR MONTHS 1977,
FOLLOWED BY TWO EACH MONTH IN 1978 UP TO TOTAL OF 15. ONE
CHINOOK WOULD BE FITTED AS VIP MODEL.

5. FELITON SAID THE CHINOOKS WOULD BE USED BY SAF
PRIMARILY FOR "COUNTRY DEVELOPMENTA", SINCE SYRIAN CIVIL
AVIATION HAD NO HELICOPTER CAPABILITY. HE NOTED THEY, OF
COURSE, WOULD BE USED BY SAF FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL AND
EQUIPMENT MOVEMENE MISSIONS SHOULD NEED ARISE.

6. AMBASSADOR ASKED ABOUT AND LEARNED BOEING HAD NOT BEEN IN
TOUCH WITH DEPT/MC RE THIS POSSIBLE SALE. AMBASSADOR URGED
BOEING TO REQUEST MC ADVISORY OPINION ASAP. HE SAID IT WOULD
BE WELL FOR BOEING TO HAVE SUCH ADVISORY OPINION BEFORE GETTING
DEEPER INTO THIS DEAL AND CREATING FALSE EXPECTATIONS
WITHIN SARG, AND IN SAUDI ARABIA AS WELL, GIVEN APPARENT
SAUDI DESIRE TO ENCOURAGE SYRIA TO DEPEND LESS ON SOVIETS FOR
SUCH EQUIPMENT. (SEE ALSO SANA 1971.) FELITON SAID BOEING
WOULD BE SEEING DEPT NEXT WEEK AND HE EMPHASIZED NEED FOR
QUICK RESPONSE GIVEN HEAD OF STEAM BUILT UP ON SYRIAN SIDE AND
POSSIBILITY DIRECT SYRIAN APPROACH TO AMBASSADOR, THUS
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ELEVATING MATTER TO GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT LEVEL.
(FELITON SAID HIGHRANKING SAF OFFICER CONSIDERING RECOMMENDING
TO PRESIDENT ASAD THAT SYRIA USE ALL ITS "INFLUENCE" WITH USG
TO OBTAIN APPROVAL.) FELITON CONCLUDED THAT IF USG ADVISORY
OPINION NEGATIVE, SYRIANS WOULD GO TO FRENCH (SUPER FRELON
HELICOPTER) OR BACK TO SOVIETS. (QUESTION: WOULD APPRECIATE
COMMENT ON PARA 2A REFTEL RE USG EXPORT CONTROLS ON SUPER
FRELON GIVEN SIKORSKY ASSISTANCE IN MANUFACTURE THIS

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AIRCRAFT.)

7. CONCLUSION: SEEMS CLEAR THAT BOEING AND SYRIANS HAVE
INDEED ENTERED PRELIMINARY NEGOTIATIONS ON THIS DEAL,
HOPING THAT RAPIDLY DEVELOPING USG/SARG BILATERAL RELATIONS
WILL MEAN EVENTUAL USG APPROVAL OF SALE. TO PREVENT
UNREALISTIC AND POTENTIALLY HARMFUL EXPECTATIONS, RECOMMEND
THAT MC PROVIDE BOEING WITH PROMPT ADVISORY OPINION AS
SOON AS IT IS REQUESTED.
MURPHY

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED DIA AND CINCEUR.

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